



NVAO • FLANDERS

QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FLANDERS 2019-2025

ORGANISATIONAL FRAMEWORK SYSTEM-WIDE ANALYSIS

JULY 2018

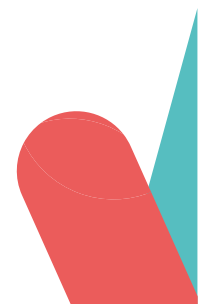


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This assessment framework applies to the recognised higher education in Flanders.

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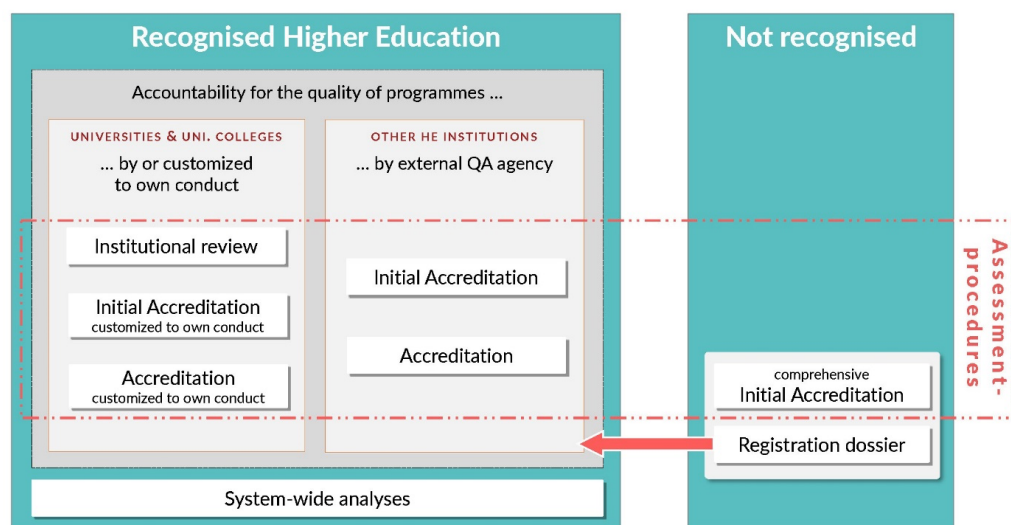
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Overview of the quality assurance system for 2019-2025

The Quality Assurance System – Flanders 2019-2025 focuses on the quality of individual programmes and its accountability. This is achieved either through the institutional review that enables universities and university colleges to account for the quality of their programmes themselves, or through the involvement of an external body. An external body is a quality assurance agency registered on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR, www.eqar.eu), or recognised by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO, www.nvao.net) on the basis of a collaboration agreement warranting that the external assessment is conducted in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG, 2015).

External, independent experts (peers) are engaged in each assessment of educational quality, either by the institution itself or in the assessment panel convened by NVAO or a quality assurance agency.



Recognised higher education

Universities and university colleges

Universities and university colleges are solely responsible for confirming the quality of their programmes. They give account to society by publishing information on the quality of each NVAO accredited programme on their website. The **institutional review** assesses the manner in which a university or university college pursues its educational policy. Within its educational policy, each institution includes a conduct for confirming the quality of its programmes. This responsibility for confirming the quality of programmes applies to accredited programmes. For this reason, each new programme to be launched is first subjected to an **initial accreditation**, a procedure in which an external panel assesses the potential quality of the programme. The period of recognition as a new programme is followed by a fully-fledged **programme accreditation**: the official decision by NVAO that the programme meets pre-determined requirements regarding quality and level.

Following such programme accreditation (with a positive outcome), responsibility for confirming the quality of the programme is vested with the universities and university colleges themselves. Should an institutional review show a university's or university college's inability to confirm the quality of its accredited programmes, NVAO will regain this responsibility. The confirmation of quality will then be done by NVAO on a programme-by-programme basis.

The initial accreditation and programme accreditation procedures are tailor-made: they are designed to optimally complement each institution's conduct for confirming the quality of its other programmes. We here refer to conduct-tailored procedures.

Other institutions

All the other recognised higher education institutions give account of the quality of their programmes through the involvement of an external body. Each new programme to be launched is first subjected to an **initial accreditation**. Subsequently, it is subjected to periodic **programme accreditations**.

System-wide analyses

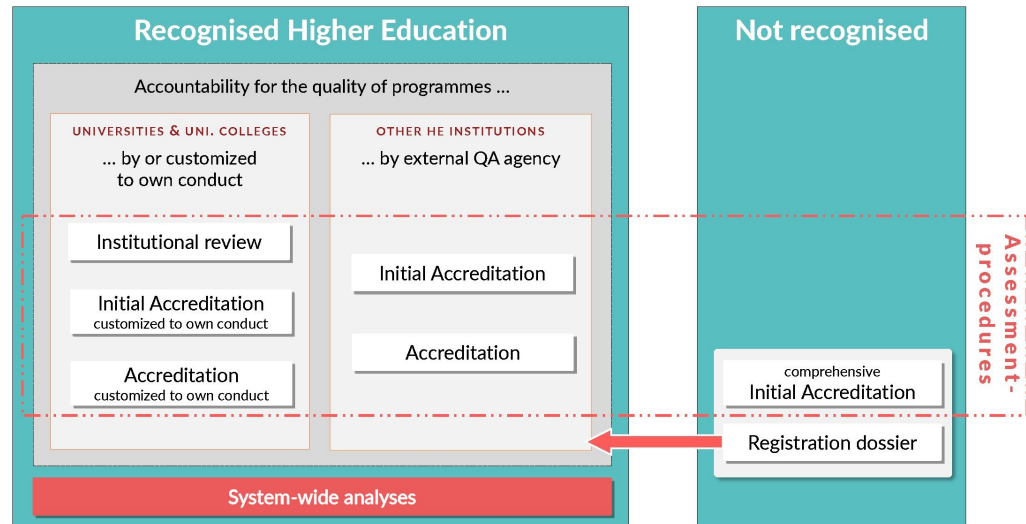
System-wide analyses are intended to map out and share good practices within the higher education community. This encourages institutions to learn from one another, specifically with respect to issues relating to educational policy and programme quality.

Non-recognised higher education

Non-recognised education providers may be registered by the Flemish Government as providers of recognised higher education programmes. Such recognition is based on a **registration file**, supplemented by a positive NVAO decision regarding the (potential) quality of the education they provide following the **comprehensive initial accreditation** of (at least one of) their programmes.

1 Introduction

System-wide analyses enable institutions and programmes to learn from one another. Within the Flemish quality assurance system, these analyses are an additional way of drawing attention to educational quality. Therefore, they will contribute to a quality culture within higher education.



The position of system-wide analyses within the Flemish Quality Assurance System.

System-wide analyses provide insight into the state of affairs regarding a specific aspect or aspects of educational policies and make this information available to the higher education community, to external stakeholders (e.g. from the professional field), and by extension, to society at large.

A system-wide analysis results in an overview report that brings together and shares the outcomes of the analysis. The main objective of a system-wide analysis is to identify good practices amongst the Flemish higher education system while taking the international perspective into consideration. This gives added value and serves as inspiration to Flemish institutions and programmes. The system-wide analysis also serves as a means of recommendation to institutions or programmes that want to adopt a similar practice.

A system-wide analysis is carried out once every year by participants belonging to Flemish institutions/programmes who have experience and/or expertise on the matter. Universities and university colleges that are subjected to an institutional review are required to participate in a system-wide analysis at least twice within every six-year cycle, either as an institution or through one or more of their programmes. Other higher education institutions will be invited by NVAO and are allowed to voluntarily participate.

This organisational framework outlines the method of operation. A system-wide analysis starts with the preparation of an exploratory note by NVAO. This note includes an initial analysis of the relevant information that is available in (international) practice and in literature. NVAO is responsible for the preparatory work and will introduce an expert if it does not possess the required expertise.

The representatives of the participating institutions/programmes agree on the expected output and take ownership for the remainder of the analysis. A peer-to-peer event will be organised where, together with international peers and experts, the topic of the analysis will be discussed on a broader international scale. This gives participants the opportunity to discuss any acquired information and to identify good practices. The results are brought forth in the overview report, which leads to a public conference regarding the system-wide analysis.



2 Process

2.1 Registration and participation

For the academic years 2020-2021 to 2025-2026, the VLUHR, the student umbrella associations, the accreditation organisation and the relevant department of the Flemish Government have developed the calendar as well as the proposed topics for the annual system-wide analysis. At the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year, there will be an opportunity to revise the calendar and topics.

Based on the calendar, NVAO sends out an annual call as well as the details regarding submission dates, allowing institutions and programmes to announce their possible interest in participating.

To register, the following documents are submitted in electronic format via aanvraag@nvaio.net:

- A motivation letter to participate signed by the board of the institution;
- Documents that may be useful for drawing up the exploratory note (see chapter 3);
- If desired, a motivated suggestion for (international) experts that could be involved in the peer-to-peer event.

Each participating institution or programme appoints a contact person who is part of the task force responsible for the analysis.

In the event that there are insufficient registrations, the VLUHR, the student umbrella associations, the NVAO and the government can make the necessary adjustments to the topic of the analysis in order to attract the interest of more participants.

2.2 Scope of the analysis

As a starting point for the system-wide analysis, it must first be determined which research question(s) will support the analysis and which input can be used. Aspects that refer to basic quality and are therefore taken for granted in every institution/programme are not taken into account in the analysis.

2.3 Exploratory note

On the basis of the available qualitative and quantitative information, NVAO prepares an exploratory note with the state of affairs at system level for the topic under investigation. This involves gathering and sorting relevant information either provided by participants, collected through available databases, or published by institutions on the basis of their conduct for confirming the quality of their programmes. It is examined whether available reports and policy documents or any publications provide insights (bringing out strengths and areas for development) in the topic. The paper also integrates international practices available in literature.

NVAO publishes the exploratory note on its website. Subsequently, within a period of 30 calendar days, participants who have determined that the topic is not (or less than expected) in line with their own practice, are allowed to withdraw, and new participants may join the task force.

2.4 Composition of the task force

NVAO appoints a task force that consists of representatives from the institutions and/or programme(s) involved. The members of the task force have the responsibility of sharing their expertise and evaluating their own practices in order to build on the information from the exploratory note.

Based on their (positive or negative) experiences and expertise, participants are expected to actively contribute to the topic and the associated quality aspects. It is preferred that participants

possess a certain affinity with the international context in order to examine aspects beyond the Flemish frame of reference. Students who have or are developing an expertise regarding the topic will also be allowed to take part in the task force. It is never the intention to limit the amount of participants or to deny any participation from institutions or programmes. In the case of large numbers of participants, it is discussed how the work can be organised efficiently.

The task force is responsible for its own scheduling and planning. It appoints a chair and a deputy chair to keep an overview of all activities. The representatives of the participating programmes and institutions commit themselves to take an active role and to participate in all meetings of the task force.

The task force is assisted by an NVAO employee who also takes the role of secretary. The duties of the secretary include writing of notes and reports, taking notes during meetings, gathering source material and data, structuring and substantiating data with evidence available from the institutions/programmes, and monitoring the progress made. Additionally, the task force can invite students to carry out part of the research as part of their bachelor's or master's thesis, internship or any other course unit.

NVAO publishes the composition of the task force on its website in order to register the compulsory participation for universities and university colleges.

2.5 Format

The task force agrees on the expected output and is in charge of managing the remainder of the analysis. The available qualitative and quantitative information from the exploratory note is discussed and then supplemented with data from the participating institutions/programmes. The aim is to establish general lines, drawing up a state of affairs, determining trends and evolutions, identifying strengths and naming points of attention. When necessary, the task force addresses other partners. Building on the exploratory note, existing practices are examined and documented.

The NVAO employee takes notes during task force meetings. These notes form the basis for the overview report.

2.6 Peer-to-peer event

During a peer-to-peer event, the preliminary insights of the task force are tested against international practices. A maximum of three participants per institution will engage in a dialogue with international peers who have a thorough and up-to-date understanding of the topic of the system-wide analysis. To this end, NVAO appoints at least two experts who have a thorough and up-to-date knowledge of the topic and the associated quality aspects. When appointing experts, NVAO takes maximum account of suggestions from the participating institutions/programmes. In making the selection, it is also envisaged that these experts can promote Flemish practices abroad.

The aim of the peer-to-peer event is to jointly identify good practices and to deepen the insights gained by the task force, whereby the Flemish practice is tested against international practices. That way, participants can learn from one another. During the event, the task force substantiates the output of the system-wide analysis. It formulates any conclusions regarding quality aspects and makes possible recommendations.

2.7 Overview report

The NVAO employee collates the results of the analysis in an overview report. This report provides the reader with clear answers to the research question(s). The report is initially addressed to the entire higher education community in Flanders, and by extension to its external

stakeholders and society at large. It is a self-contained document that can be read in its own right. It describes the current state of affairs regarding the topic, while paying attention to good practices and the context in which they can work. In addition, an estimate can be made of expected evolutions and trends. The overview report also puts practice in Flanders in an international perspective. Where possible, conclusions or recommendations are formulated regarding the quality aspects that are related to the topic of the analysis. In this way, the system-wide analyses draw attention to the quality of education and offer added value in the light of continuous quality enhancement.

The overview report comprises a maximum of 25 pages (excluding appendices) and is preceded by a concise summary. The overview report includes the following data:

- The full name of the institution(s) and programme(s) that participated in the system-wide analysis with their administrative data (see chapter 3: Documentation);
- The composition of the task force, with a brief description of the background and expertise of the experts;
- An overview of the various meetings and their agenda;
- An overview of the material studied;
- A list of abbreviations.

2.8 Endorsement of the overview report

After all members of the task force have approved the content of the overview report, the chair of the task force endorses the report. The draft overview report is forwarded to NVAO no later than eight weeks before the public announcement event. NVAO assesses the internal consistency of the report and its traceability; if necessary, NVAO will suggest adjustments to the task force to clarify the findings or the outcomes of the analysis. Ownership of the overview report remains vested with the task force.

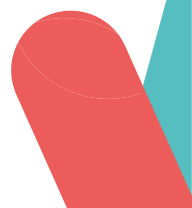
The overview report is forwarded to the NVAO board for endorsement.

2.9 Dissemination of the outcomes

The overview report is widely shared and presented at a public announcement event. During this event, there is ample opportunity for testimonials and the sharing of good practices. NVAO is responsible for the organisation of this event.

Every Flemish institution and all the programmes that participated in the analysis receive the final overview report, at the latest on the day of the public announcement event. The NVAO then publishes the overview report on its website and forwards it to the Flemish minister of education.

If possible, the overview report results in publications in (international) professional literature and the outcomes are presented on the international forum. This contributes to the visibility of Flemish practice abroad and draws attention to the quality of education at Flemish higher education institutions. In this way, the system-wide analyses form a keystone of the quality assurance system.



3 Documentation

3.1 Administrative data of the participating institution or programme

The administrative data are included in the motivation letter.

For institutions:

1. The name of the institution;
2. Name, position, telephone number and email address of the institution's representatives in the task force.

For programmes:

1. The name of the institution;
2. The name of the programme;
3. If applicable, the majors/specialisations involved in the analysis and the location(s) where they are taught;
4. Name, position, telephone number and email address of the programme's representative in the task force.

3.2 Information regarding the topic of the system-wide analysis

Institutions or programmes that have agreed to participate in the system-wide analysis provide the documents listed below. This normally concerns existing documents that are available within the programme or institution. All the documents listed below should be provided only **to the extent that it relates to the topic** of the system-wide analysis and can **contribute to the exploratory note**. The documentation can only be submitted electronically. When necessary, all efforts will be made to safeguard the confidentiality of the supplied documents.

1. Motivation letter to participate (max 400 words);
2. Any relevant strategic goals or parts of the educational policy of the institution/programme;
3. Policy documents, reports or meeting minutes of consultations in relevant councils, committees and bodies;
4. Relevant indicators, KPIs and targets that the institution/programme uses in its educational policy;
5. (A reference to) the information that the institution/programme publicly shares and any other relevant publications.

Additional material can be shared within the task force at a later stage. This may include:

1. The practice(s) that the institution has implemented regarding the topic, including a brief description about the embedding in the educational policy and/or the context of the institution/programme (max 400 words per practice);
2. Own experiences and qualitative and/or quantitative data from surveys, focus groups or analyses;
3. Depending on the topic, the input and experiences of external stakeholders, peers and experts;
4. Depending on the topic, the input and experiences of students;
5. An overview of relevant terminology used by the institution.





